In Crimson We Fall

The train lurched to life, and began its clatter against the track. I tried dozing off, but far too much lay on my mind. Instead, my eyes darted over to the front of the coach, where I observed huge tourist bags. Railway employees marked most luggage with a soft blue and white spiral that gestured where everyone was heading—the 1972 Munich Games. For me, there was no bag, as this would be a one-way trip. A continent away from home, I crossed my arms and clutched my sweatshirt, shivering in refrigerated Dutch air.

The cabin door smashed open, and a young man, gasping for breath, stumbled through the coach, finding a spot an aisle across from me. A couple rows back, a German attendant skimmed through checking tickets.

“Please sir! I need to get to Munich tonight!” the man pleaded, still struggling for air.

The attendant was not moved, and responded in a hue duller than his grey uniform. “Sorry sir, company policy. Be glad I don’t arrest you. There is a full train tonight, and you have no ticket. If you don’t get off at the next stop, I will get my supervisor.”

The train was already fifteen minutes behind schedule and I was not going to accept any more delays. Some impulse, out of nowhere, urged me to act. Noticing the passenger next to me gone in the restroom, I waved my ticket in the air.

“Here is the ticket!” I called out, “I saw him drop it on the ground.” Thankfully, the attendant trusted my gesture, and passed on to the next row. I let out a sigh of relief.

“Thank you so much!” he whispered, once arriving at the open seat, “You have saved my day. I’m Andre. What is your name?”

“Saud,” I replied, shaking hands. “Don’t mention it.” Once up close, Andre reminded me of my father, with his rough black hair and piercing gaze, albeit Andre was only a few years older than I. He affectionately held out a tattered family portrait, taken from his chest pocket.

“No, I really do owe you. My lovely daughter Anouk cried all day at the hospital, so I stayed as late I could.”

I paused for a second; the Dutchman sure had a queer way of showing gratitude. However, aside from his pale Western skin and peculiar locks of hair, there was something to this man that demanded respect. Ignoring his comment, I praised Allah, ruler of my kindness, for his gentle heart.

The restroom light overhead glowed green. “It was very nice to meet you Andre, but you must get moving. The owner of this seat is returning.“

“Of course,” he responded, “But don’t think I’ll forget this Saud.” At that, Andre scurried into the next coach.

The train then resumed its listless drone, and a belated sun sunk beneath the surrounding mountains. Mere hours separated me from life’s culmination, my family’s proudest moment. Trembling, I faced the Holy Mosque, straightening my back, and squeezing both knees. Emptying my mind, I prayed in earnest for his holy instructions:

*“He is Allah, the One! Allah is He on whom all depend.” Live through Allah Saud, and you will be strong.*

Two taxis zipped through Munich’s vacated streets. My illuminated athletic watch read 3:30 a.m., September fifth; we were alarmingly close, yet the darkness outside provided a blanket of comfort. Issa and Tony went over the plan once more.

“Have everything packed?” Issa asked.

“Of course,” I replied, almost annoyed by his question. I had checked the track bag countless times; pills, ammo, grenades, stockings, and an AK-47 were neatly arranged within: nothing stood forgotten.

“Six or seven people should be inside,” Issa assumed. “Avoid the windows: their TV is mounted there, and could give us away. “

Tony patted my back twice in stiff embrace. “Feel lucky at your calling Saud; few people can justify their faith as much as you.”

“The thanks goes all to you for getting me into this”

“If I didn’t find you, another group would have. After what they did to our parents, you must want this more than any of us. Just remember to not get too caught up in this.”

“Do not worry. I would never stain Palestine in needless blood, if that’s what you mean.” I sensed the grenades at the bottom of my bag, knowing I was much more dispensable than the Israelis.

The car grounded to a halt and I swallowed my first pill, entering a Zen-like state. It was time.

I followed four others towards a fence slightly taller than Issa. Our Egyptian track uniforms disguised us in colorful blaze. Red Adidas stripes and intense white illuminated the night; we stood out like blood in snow.

“Need some help there?” slurred an American, pressing her face inches from Issa’s.

“Why…yes,” Issa considered, playing along. “Get your friend over there”

“Sure. *Anything* for you,” the blonde seductively answered, grabbing her boyfriend. He unassumingly handed our weighty bags over the fence to Issa.

“Stupid Americans,” Issa grumbled under his breath.

Chuckling, we walked casually through the Olympic Village, spotted but unsuspected. We hid at the stairwell to make some final preparations, and remove our tracksuits; three others, who had clearance into the building, met up with us. They had entered just as easily through an exit gate, which had been carelessly left ajar.

I ripped two eyeholes in a tar-black nylon stocking and slid it tightly over my face, tying a knot on top my head to finish the job. Paolo followed suit, and as he turned my direction, I let out a silent scream. His innocent, youthful face was replaced with a soulless expression, permanently etched on his face. I wanted to take the mask right off, but instead, I tried reminding myself of Tony’s comment; I should want this more than anyone. I thought of my deceased parents, resting just beyond the border of West Bank, and hoped for their sake that Tony was right.

Maysa and I were supposed to responsibly watch each other, a difficult task for children of six and eight. Mom and Dad had left for the day to visit the village where they first met; they said it was in northern West Bank, but I knew better than to believe them. Every night at the dinner table, my parents talked of a time when barbed wire fences did not imprison us Palestinians, and we were free to journey wherever we pleased. I knew, that night, that my parents yearned for one last breath of liberated air. But I was too young to understand the consequences. Savoring the taste of mom’s hearty tomato sauce, I waited for them through the night; the second night my sister joined in. It took a week until we received word of their demise; to this day I still do not know whether my parents ever made it.

I took another pill and returned to my senses.

“31 Connollystraße, the house that will never be forgotten” Tony whispered, closing in on apartment one. Right then, some Israeli inside the building began to shout.

“Hurry,” Issa screamed, “they must have spotted us!”

Salah fiddled with the keys before finally unlocking the door, costing us vital seconds. Glass shattered in the background, and I heard thuds from people jumping out of their rooms. Issa, Paolo, and I shoved our weapons in the crevice of the door, pushing against some ponderous force on the other side.

At last, the door broke open, sending a burly man crashing to the ground. We scavenged the bedrooms in seconds, but only two more hostages, besides the large man, were taken. Issa scrambled for the next bedroom; it was dark, and he felt for the light switch.

Three hundred pounds lunged out of the darkness, wielding a fruit knife. Issa hit the floor, pinned under the behemoth, but avoided the knife. Before I could raise my gun, Salah tactlessly pulled his trigger, emptying his magazine at the fighter’s jaw. Salah’s action seemed uncalled for, until I looked into the Jew’s eyes. He glared at me in ardent disgust, spitting pieces of his gums into his occupied blood pool, and unintimidated by the gun slung around my shoulder; he was ready to die. Allah beckoned me to move forward.

I seized the bastard’s cheek and speared through until my fingers met. “Get us into that other apartment, or your left cheek gets it too!” I shrieked. He groaned in defeat, and staggered towards apartment three like the stubborn ass he was. Issa motioned for him to open the apartment, and he obeyed in painful grimace.

A couple Israelis slept peacefully, unstirred by the commotion just down the hall; a few other athletes, probably hearing the gunshots, walked right into our assault. After binding the hostages, we quickly counted them off, pressed for time before the police arrived. Eight hostages total were rounded up, bloodlessly, and we headed back to Tony in Apartment One. On the walk back however, I noticed some familiar curls.

It was Andre, the one who would “never forget” me. With my demon mask on, I was unrecognizable, but under his watch, I became exposed and childlike. I tried to tell myself it was not he, but they: that this is the only way to free my people, to free my family, *to save my soul*.

I gave my mask a good tug and prayed, extending a blessing to Andre. This war was battling with my sanity. Tony nudged me toward the line of hostages in a firm shove, and I roared a battle cry of my own. My muscles tightened to commanding stature. The bloodied swordsmen from earlier shrunk under my presence, and I waited, teasing the Jew of his meek position; I swung my AK in impressive clout, knocking him to the floor in attempt to crack his skull; the ass squirmed, unable to control his bound limbs. Bullets pierced through his dense flesh as he let out one last squeal. I howled as Allah’s faithful hound—a true fedayeen.

“His presence brought a risk to us all,” I rationed to Tony.

“Don’t be concerned about what’s already done. Take another pill, and ignore your gut. We still need “

I leaned against the apartment’s walls and tried to tune out the drill of bullets still ringing in my ears.

We named ourselves Black September in remembrance of thousands who lost their lives for Palestine. I knew by comparison that one death was nothing, perfectly acceptable, but I could not help thinking that these people were not far different from myself. But alas, I am naïve. Like revolutionaries before us, we are forced resorting to desperate tactics to alert the world of our fight. And to new age Western imperialists, it takes radical measures. Those that swarmed Africa plowed through natives with their machine guns; never once did they look at their weak adversaries’ arrows, or their cruel beheadings, and call it oppression. Westerners must have lost that feeling long ago. If only the Israeli had been cooperative.

Not wasting any time, Issa grabbed Andre and lead him towards the balcony, in sight of a negotiator below.

Tony held a phone next to me, playing with its cord. “You see him, right? The hostages are fine—now where is your part of the deal?”

The hotel phone buzzed back in Arabic. “The prisoners’ release is being prepared as we speak. Once the phone lines start running, Prime Minister Meir will be happy to discuss it with you.”

“Don’t lie with me. I see Meir’s refusal on my television, and I also see your men around this building—so don’t try any tricks.”

“No need to fret; we would never endanger the lives of Israeli athletes.”

“You don’t sound so certainBruno”

“Look, if your Fatah group wants money, then West Germany will gladly conduct an exchange. Think this through, and name your price— this offer can help both of us.”

“Call back when Israel agrees to our terms.”

“Wait! Consider this: my offer is your only chance to get out of this alive.”

“Irrelevant. At least then we’ll go to heaven.” Tony responded to the police chief in voice strong as steel, but I could tell from his contemplating eyes that plan b was already in progress.

A moonless twilight enveloped Fürstenfeldbruck Airport. I squinted through the helicopter’s hazy window, barely able to see the scene outside. Issa and Tony were supposed to be inspecting a seven-two-seven jet. A few minutes had already passed, and I grew worried; no explosion had gone off, however, so I assumed their safety. At last, the two exited the plane, but then, all hell broke loose.

Gunfire rained down on the tarmac, and three junior members fell to asphalt. I panicked at the notion of unholy death: in anguish and unsaved. Paolo slid open the helicopter door, and we returned fire, trying to cover Issa and Tony, who managed to hide beneath the other helicopter. Meanwhile, one of the snipers on the east side caught us off guard, but to our astonishment, the bullet hit one of the hostages directly in the forehead, like the German aimed for him.

Bullets ripped apart my right thigh, forcing me down onto my side. I yelled at Paolo to get out of the way, finally admitting we were done for, but he would not budge. I tried shaking him to get my attention, but as I did so, Paolo’s neck shot back like a ragdoll’s, detached from his spine.

“Saud! It’s time!” Issa screeched. I had never witnessed Issa so nervous, but now, he sounded like a five year old talking to his mother. Issa yanked the pull ring of his grenade, and shut his eyes. I recognized the lullaby he mouthed; my mother used to sing to me—Yalla tnam. Time to sleep.

A red cloud of fire took up my entire window. The vast plume tore apart my comrades’ helicopter like a plastic toy. A corpse flung out from the aircraft, smoke still coughing from its seared lips. A piece of crimson twine, used to tie the hostages, burned in merciless flames; one hand lay charring, still attached to the rope. Everything reeked of death.

I turned to the five hostages in my helicopter that fervently prayed for their lives. It was my turn to fight for Palestine. The thought of me a dismembered corpse was bad enough, but then there was Andre. He was a father, a husband, and possibly a friend.

My hands were drenched with sweat and shook out of control. My index finger slipped over the trigger.

Israelis had seized the holy land, killed my parents, and slaughtered countless Palestinians, yet these four pleading faces had done none of that. I knew it was Israel—the monster—I was after, but it was hard to understand that these people were my only means of fighting back.

My howl diminished to that of a cub’s. Rounds roared from my AK in compensation. I watched Andre and the others have life sucked right out of them, and made sure every last bullet pounded deep into their carcasses. Clasping my convulsing hands, I prayed that Allah would overlook my hesitation. I keeled over in extreme pain, and my vision faded to dull white. Sounds of yelling negotiators, crackling skin, and tearing flesh all ended. The tarmac silenced to our wordless deed. Everything hushed except for a lone, endless cry of someone smoldering in spiteful blaze. The shameful cry never stopped.

Attribution of Research

"Abu Daoud: No Regrets for Munich Olympics." *The New York Times* 23 Feb. 2006: Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

* the group is named Black September, and is based off of a bloody battle with Jordan
* main parent group: Fatah faction
* intention was to get out word, no deaths
* daoud would not repeat such act, but still finds Munich necessary for world awareness

Bard, Mitchell. “The Munich Massacre.” *Jewish Virtual Library* (2011): n. pag. Web. 13 February 2011.

* 3:30 am, September 5th: group in taxis (2 taxis)
* 5 tracksuit donned terrorists climb over fence
* the fence is 6’6”
* all terrorists are seen in plain view, drunken Americans aid terrorists (unintentionally)
* 3 others have credentials to enter village, don’t need to use them
* 8 terrorists total, mentioned names include leader “Issa,” deputy “Tony,” and junior members “Paolo,” “Salah,” and “Samir”
* arrive at Firstenfeldbruck from helicopter

Martin, Gus*. Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues.* 3rd ed. SAGE Publications. Google Books. Web. 22 Feb. 2011

* Anti-colonialist Statesmen who rose to prominence were referred to by adversaries as terrorists
* Terrorism is matter of practical choice, “irregular tactics” used against colonial or indigenous opponents in civil wars
* Killing or dying in defense of faith assures place in paradise
* Symbolism used to rationalize extreme acts of violence (seen when Saud references mules)

*Munich Massacre Documentary*. Dir. Daniel Parsi. 2009. *WeJew*. Web. 15 Feb. 2011.

* Wrestling coach Moshe Weinberg attacks terrorists with a fruit knife
* Prime Minister Golda Meir: Israel obligated to fight back to “bitter end”
* With bad lighting, and little qualifications, snipers failed their plan
* Deadly friendly fire (2 killed weren’t hostages, but numbers recorded aren’t exact)

*Olympic Massacre: The True Story*. Dir. Sebastian Dehnhardt, Uli Weidenbach and Manfred Oldenburg. ZDF. Web. 15 Feb. 2011.

* Olympic village’s exit was commonly entered, German security was a joke
* In phone conversation, negotiator tries to scare terrorists with death, saying “you’re not going to get out of this alive”
* Andre Spitzer arrived at Olympic village night before, his daughter was sick in Netherlands, he had no ticket on the train (more details like Anouk are in story)
* Fedayeen: ready to die for cause, common term referring to Palestinian terrorists
* intercom at airport
* one victim in helicopter was “not dead yet,” screaming

"Palestinians." *EveryCulture*. Advameg Inc. Web. 27 Feb. 2011.

* All prayers face mecca (Saudi Arabia)
* Common hobby is reciting out of Koran
* Or Quran, translation of common prayer: “He is Allah, the One! Allah is He on Whom all depend.” (112:1-112:4)

"Terrorists at the Summer Olympics." *Crime and Punishment: Essential Primary Sources.* Ed. K. Lee Lerner and Brenda Wilmoth Lerner. Detroit: Gale, 2006. 141-144. Gale Opposing Viewpoints In Context. Web. 18 Feb. 2011.

* Cloaked figures covered in black mask, only eye holes, extremely terrifying
* Mask tied at top of head
* Andre Spitzer got to talk to negotiators from second story balcony, all in front of international television cameras
* High ranking Germans including Police Chief Bruno Mer conducted negotiations
* West Germany offered unlimited sums of money, still refused

"West Bank and Gaza." *CultureGrams Online Edition.* ProQuest, 2011. Web. 16 Feb 2011.

* Men shake hand or pat back of shoulder for greeting friends
* Eye contact maintained while conversing (arguably included)
* Son is responsible for taking care of his mother and sisters

Wolff, Alexander. "TIME Magazine: When the Terror Began." *Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME.com*. Time Inc., 02 Sept. 2002. Web. 9 Mar. 2011.

* 31 Connollystrasse, Olympic village, were visited in advance by Black September leaders
* Germans give Palestinians excuses: that some members of the Israeli cabinet couldn't be reached; that not all the prisoners could be located
* Wrestling referee Gutfreund apparently heard the rattling of the door, pushed against door and allowed others to escape
* Issa: "I am a soldier. We are at war."

"World Weather Online." *Munich Travel and City Guide*. Web. 27 Feb. 2011.

* Sun sets at around 8 pm (train arrives at 9)
* High temperatures at 66 degrees for September, chilly for Arab
* Mountains at close proximity to Munich

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"World Weather Online." *Munich Travel and City Guide*. Web. 27 Feb. 2011.

—a memory of something that shall never be repeated—but now the bloodshed has returned

only toThe airport crashed down to the circles of hell.